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Ruby Glover

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Q: Interview with Ruby Glover, August 28, 2002, at the home of Ruby Glover in Baltimore, Maryland.

Q: Would be kind enough to introduce yourself and tell us where you were born.

Glover: My name is Ruby Glover, and my birth date is December 6th, 1929. So this year I will celebrate my 73rd birthday. I'm a Baltimorean, born and raised, educated right here in Baltimore, not too far away from where I live today.

I am about to share with a dear friend a lot of information that probably I never thought about sharing or having to share. I just had a good time daily and was very thankful for the blessings that were given to me at birth.

Q: Just fine. Tell me where did you grow up in East Baltimore.

Glover: I grew up in East Baltimore about five blocks from here. I lived on Monument Street, right there in the thirteen hundred block, which would have been between the alleyway which is now the driveway for the Chick Webb Center, and Central Avenue. And that encompasses a school yard — that's what's there now. 1309 Monument Street is where the majority of my young life was.

However, I do know that I was born like twelve blocks from there in a small street called Dallas Street. Of course, in the '20s not many black women had their babies in hospitals. There were still quite a few nurse midwives who were available to them for delivery of children, and I was born at home in Dallas Street. So that would have been between Monument and Madison, somewhere in that area. It's documented, but you don't remember that when you get to the gentle ages. That's pretty much where it was.

And then from first grade, because I didn't go to kindergarten, first grade was in what is now the Sojourner-Douglass College. That was my elementary school. So we're still within the parameters of that same circle. The elementary school that is there now is sitting pretty much

where the Dunbar Theater sat. So that's Central Avenue. But my first grade on up to the fifth grade (because then, you did fifth and sixth grade) was there, and then I went to junior high at seventh grade.

So my junior high school is the middle school today, between McElderry Street and Orleans, that was Jefferson Street. So I still remember what beautiful streets were there.

But all of this area is a part of my growing up.

Q: What about your parents? Were they involved in music?

Glover: My mom. I didn't have the pleasure to know my dad. My dad was killed in my second year. I knew I had a father who was a seaman, but I never saw him or could tell anyone that I actualized with him. But my mom always gave us the impression that he was fine, and I did learn at a much older age, about tenth year, that he was killed when I was two. He was shot the day that he decided to come home and then go back out to sea. He was killed, and it was a robbery, so they tell me. The store was not far from where our house was. When he got out of the car to come to my mother, a guy who was robbing the store ran out the store, passed between my mom and my dad, and the firing of the bullet from the store keeper's gun killed him.

And that's all I knew, and it never came up again. I think once or twice I may have asked my mom about it as I got older, but we never talked about it. So there are usually some things that the older folks —

Q: Don't feel comfortable.

Glover: And so we never discussed it again. But my mom was the one. My mom was a young teenager who wanted to do a lot with music, could sing — was always singing. And she had a younger brother, who was like to her. She and her brother were the youngest of her mother's children and, of course, both sang. They loved to sing duets and go around singing, and that's how I heard it. I only heard it in my house where we lived because then — pianos and club life and all — your community was pretty much someplace that people were about each other in circles. They would always be together. Your home was always an area of enjoyment and that's how mine was.

Baltimore was such a musical town — I didn't live far from the Club Astoria. I didn't live far from the Orleans Club that used to be Tanglefoot's [Roy McCoy's] place. Well, my mother and all of them would frequent those because that was right in the same area that I lived in. She knew just about all of them, and she worked in some of the nightclubs as a waitress. And you know you could be an entertainer and sing and still earn your keep right there. So East Baltimore became her area.

She wasn't born here, though. She was born in Barbados. She remembered to tell us that. And her family life brought her from Barbados into the States. They first resided in Gary, Indiana. Then my grandfather, her father, decided that he would like to come to Maryland, and they went to the Eastern Shore. And that much I remember of his life. I knew that my mother's mother was

a nurse midwife who studied in Oxford, because those papers were still a part of the Bible that she kept. On my grandfather's side, there were fifteen boys.

When he married my grandmother, her mother, there were two girls and a boy. I never saw my Aunt Jessie who was my mother's older sister. She evidently died before my mom had children. And my uncle was the joy of her life. Both of them were very, very popular, very warm and friendly folks. Clarence "Du" Burns [former Mayor of the City of Baltimore] and my uncle were like best friends from childhood, evidently. I often remember having to go with them to sing and dance while they would treat me to an ice cream cone and [laughter] bring me back home.

But that's the life that I remember. And all of this area is quite familiar because the Old Town Mall was very much a popular area for the familiarity of your family life. My mom used to walk from our house to this street, Sterling Street, and on both sides of the street, of course, she knew the persons who lived here. I would get to know the children, and Mott Street, there were families along Mott Street. In the back of Mott Street was the beautiful Belair Market, both open and enclosed. So I got to skip down the street while she would chat with the neighbors, and many times I'd sing. I'd like to skip and sing, and my younger sister was born with rheumatic fever so a lot of her life, about thirteen years of her life, she was in and out of the hospital, always with nurses, not able to do a lot of romping. So I was the romping, jumping, skipping, tomboyish little girl that everybody got to see. You didn't see a lot of my sister.

But my mom was very, very energetic, loved to sing. She reminded me that music was the soul of our life, and I enjoyed it because I got a chance to see a lot of the folks who were singing and doing around that time. I'm an early '30s baby.

Q: In Baltimore, there were so many wonderful blues singers in Baltimore.

Glover: Yes there were.

Q: And you hear less about them than the people who played the clubs on the Avenue. Who were some of the ones?

Glover: Well, there's Wee Bea Booze. And most folks know that she wrote "In the Dark". The words of "In the Dark" are hers. No one tried to change those words, but she wrote that song. She was a tiny, little-framed lady who used to visit with my mom when she worked at the Club Orleans. She worked at another little club between Monument and Caroline, and Monument and Central Avenue. There was a small area of Spring Street that had a club. I don't remember the name of the club, but it was a nightclub, and Wee Bea Booze would perform there. My mom would perform between there and a club on Monument Street. It sat where the alleyway is, on the corner of Eden and Monument, which was the opposite end of the street between Caroline and Spring, there was the First Apostolic Church that sits down on Caroline Street now, that was on Eden Street.

But in the back of that, Spring Street, where Ashland Avenue is, that's where Chick Webb lived. His niece and I were the same age, so we went to school together. And so there were times when Ella [Fitzgerald] and he would be visiting. It was nothing for us to just sit in the yard and see

them as they come in or hear them practicing, or to get to know that he was a dignitary that was very much honored.

Bea was just exciting! She wasn't a big woman. She was a short little lady with a pleasant smile. But you had Dorothy Green, Dottie they called her. And there was a gentleman whom I saw about three weeks ago, and I can't remember his name, but he had a fine tenor voice. And he and my uncle would love to sing. They would sit on the step next to the ice cream parlor and sometimes harmonize. But it was people like that that you got to see a lot of.

There is Johnny Sparrow and his Bows and Arrows. Well, they would visit my house because my mother — every house, I think, had a piano. On Friday or Saturday you would have like your own jam session because they would get off of work. They'd come. Well, from Johnny Sparrow, I learned to sing "Pennies from Heaven" because he would always say, can you remember the lyrics, and I would shake my head yes, and my mother would always let us sit on the steps that would come down into the living room. But you could only stay a little while because after a while, you know, children had their space and the adults had theirs.

Ernie Washington — I hear very little. I think somewhere I have an album of his, but I remember seeing Ernie, well, now it's been maybe about twenty-five or thirty years ago. But he was a very, very beautiful jazz pianist who used to come and sit and play, and my mother would sing, and my uncle would sing, and they would just have a good time. But Ernie Washington went to live in — I want so say Hawaii. It was one of the Polynesian areas that he lived for a long time. And then once, many years ago — it had to be close to thirty years because I was working at [Johns] Hopkins — he came through town and the Avenue [Pennsylvania Avenue] was still going. It was before the riot [1968], so we still had Buck's Bar. And he came to visit. I don't remember what brought him here, but I remember how lovely it was to see someone who remembers you as a child, and then, of course, wants to share some of his travels and his writing.

Wonderful jazz pianist who just had a wealth of knowledge about singers because that's why he went away from here. So I don't know if he's still living, but Ernie I remember, and it was just always so good to hear and see him because he liked to sing as well. Not a very big stately man, but about 5'6". Demonstrated quite a bit of entertaining. I'm going to look for that album because I have it. And it's just very interesting to see folks who remember my mom quicker than they remember me. I was such a little girl when he left, but I've had the pleasure of seeing Johnny Sparrow's family, what's left of them.

I share a conversation monthly with a friend of mine whose name is Irma Curry. Now Irma was the first to leave Baltimore and go with Lionel Hampton. But we went to Dunbar High School together. We went to grade school together and became friends, and then later both our careers in singing developed right there in our elementary school life.

So it's been fascinating to see persons who knew you when you were younger or to go visit spots that might be a little different today, but they offer quite a bit of memories — for the area itself seems to change. What used to be there is no longer there, so it's been exciting.

And I'm telling you, that's how I saw [Roy] McCoy the first time, as a part of the Club Orleans group. The picture that you have of them—. I remember when I used to walk with my mother, because then it was after they had built the Chick Webb Center. My mom and just about all the persons who lived along that block, Mrs. Chester and her husband's family, we all moved one and half blocks away to the twelve hundred block of Madison Street. So it wasn't far away, but it was far enough for you to walk around the corner on Gay Street and see them when they would take their break. And my mother used to say, do you come around this corner and hear the music? I said, yes, but I stand on the other side of the street so that I'm not being punished, because then people could chastise you and send you home.

So I would stay across — there was a furniture store across the street from it and I would stand on the opposite side. Or I would ask, could I sit on the little stool that the gentleman had out there when they would play early on Saturdays. Some Saturdays they would have like a special, and I'd get a chance to hear them.

But he was always so tall and stately. You'd look at him, a little one would look at him in awe because everyone else just seemed general, but he was tall and he was pleasant. He always had such a charm about him and he would smile. Of course, I liked to sing and I liked to dance so I would always be catching the melodies when they were playing.

Then they would open the doors. They didn't have air conditioning. If it was hot, they would open the doors. And they had those swinging half shutters that you could just about enjoy the music right through there, especially on Fridays.

So it all comes back as great memories. Loving neighborhoods. Great rearing by my mom, and a lot of love and attention from the neighborhood because then if you could perform, and since I liked the idea of singing, I'd wind up singing for persons who had died. I remember at about six or seven years old, asking my mother how come everybody — then you had everything in your home. They didn't have funeral parlors opening up. It was still very personal, and only your immediate friends and family were a part of that going-home ceremony. So I would wind up singing for persons who had passed and were in the casket. And I remember asking my mother one day why is it everyone else seems to applaud — or I said clap your hands. It was really my first putting together that it was death and not asleep, like I used to say. Why was the person asleep and everybody is tearful or crying? And that was the first time my mother expressed to me that the person that I was celebrating, they're going on. I was a part of the celebration, and I was the living part of the celebration.

And I said, but I never knew that person. And my mother said you probably don't remember that you knew this person in their living way. And since you are still a baby, we don't force you to look upon their face of the person who is dead. But they are grateful that in their sleep and going-home ceremony, you participated. And so that always made a great deal of good feelings. The feelings were always good.

And then when I lost my godmother, it was not so easy. And so my mom didn't express any desire unless I wanted to. I remember I didn't want to, because her son was crying, and by me being a part of their family all the time, I was generally seeing him smile. And I remember it was

quite a sad moment for me. That's when my mother chose to say that she would not ask or call or have people call upon me to do that. That it was something that I began to rationalize, and I had the right to say no. But that was my first audience. [Laughter] First one.

And you look at sadness, and they would try not to be so sad, especially with the little ones. So I was about eight. By then I was beginning to show quite a bit of talent, and by then my teachers at the school recognized that I had a talent. I was very lucky because I had a music teacher, two music teachers that they were very wonderful and early enough.

One of them was Mrs Chester, Georgiana. And the other one was Mrs. Williams, Mildred Williams. I never will forget them. And at, where Sojourner sits now, that was my first stage because we what we called an outreach of talent, and they chose Dorothy and Wizard of Oz to portray that year. I was Dorothy, and the first group that I really performed with musically were the Lion and the Tin Man, and we had a ball.

But every year we had some type of celebration. That was my first. As we grew musically, we grew closer together, and the first sextet was created when we got into middle school under Miss Chester's skill and Miss Williams. It was called the Parrish Sextet, and James Parrish, who's still living, played piano, McKevett Seymour who's dead and gone, played bass, James Tillery played guitar, and James Brown played drums. And we had a saxophonist who left us after we graduated from high school and went into service. I can never remember his name. And so that was at the beginning of the music, my career. We were a sextet.

Q: But where did you all sing? Where did you perform?

Glover: At Dunbar [High School], for the dances and the special occasions. By the time I was fifteen, sixteen, we were good. We had been pretty much a part of the lot of the amateur contesting. We won. We got so good until if we had talent contests, the kids would always say, well we don't want to be on the contest if the Sextet, Ruby and the Sextet are going to be on 'cause they always win.

Mrs. Williams was the one who said well, what else would you all do? And it was James Parrish, who's a firefighter — that's what he is today. I think he's retired. But it was he who said, well, we asked to play for the dances at some of the halls, because you know we could go by being teenagers, well supervised. We could do the "Y," we could go to Odd Fellows Hall and a couple of areas, and then there were a couple big bands like Doug McArthur and his Blue Notes and King Draper and who were asking my mom for permission for me to sing with them.

But she would always say, she has to be chaperoned, and you know you can't have liquor around her because that's against the rules. And so the Biddle Hall and, oh my goodness, the Odd Fellows, and there was another dance hall that was right there on Pennsylvania Avenue, right before you got up near the Royal. The Amsterdam — that's what sticks in my mind.

But I was a teenager and so I got chaperoned by the wife of the leader of the group, and my mom would let them come pick me up and I sang with the big bands. The union allowed us, at fifteen,

sixteen, to be a part of their union without paying a lot of dues just so we could appear as music for the "Y" on Friday nights and the Odd Fellows Hall.

And school dances, even though we were East Baltimore, we played for some of the things that brought the two schools together, Douglass and Dunbar. And it's amazing because I looked at Charles Funn about a week ago with the Dunbar big band and sextet, and I look at Douglass, and they're still the two greatest, producing music and producing new musicians all the time — so it's not strange. It's not new. It's that the old system aids in the production of those who come from those two areas in music. And it was just fascinating to look over Charles Funn's shoulder and see the development, as well as looking over the shoulder of the two music teachers who have been up there at Douglass. It's fascinating

I'm very, very lucky and privileged to be able to hire them, the new musicians, in capacities that are not so restrictive as when I was young. But they were there. The guidance was there. That, I hope, will never, never disappear because it's so needed for the developing musician — to get to know those who are always there in some capacity sitting in your audience, reviewing, suggestions being given for your betterment. It's just wonderful.

Q: Who are some of the young faces that you've seen that you could almost guarantee that they're going to have a career?

Glover: Oh, it goes further than that. I can take you three to five years back.

Q: Okay.

Glover: Camay [Murphy] and I were a part of the first organization, the Jazz Heritage Foundation, and we viewed Antonio Hart as being a very striking individual in his music, and wanting to further his future in the music. I think we were the first to give him a stipend as part of his going to school in New York. And so we raised the funds so that he could get a scholarship from the Jazz Heritage Foundation.

And it was so funny and wonderful because it was like everyone was thinking Antonio, and when his name up in our meeting, it was like we stumbled over each other to just say yes, and got so tickled that he was chosen. So he was one of the first. Then Dontae Winslow is another product of that overseeing, that behind-the-scenes push. And, of course, he's made every step.

Gary Bartz, his dad was someone whose foresight in the earlier time period of my life — I've been able to watch Gary develop from a young teenager whose dad envisioned a jazz club. It was right over here in East Baltimore, on Gay Street, right between North Avenue and Port Street. He wanted a club. He didn't want his son having to venture farther away, just to have the artists that were his dream or his vision. He wanted his vision to be able to be developed inside of a club that would bring the artists to him. And I'm telling you, Mr. Bartz had a jazz club that was phenomenal, so quaint and wonderful.

And as I go by there — it's a church today — but it brings back so much.

Q: What was the name of the club?

Glover: I'm getting that now. What did he call it? The North End Lounge. That's what it was, the North End Lounge because it sat right at North Avenue, and North Avenue pivots right to the Baltimore cemetery. The North End Lounge, and it was always packed. I pretty much believe that vision either started before Left Bank [Jazz Society] or about the same time that Left Bank was coming together. Because it was obvious that there was going to be another section of Baltimore City in the black neighborhoods that would give you a theater that you could go to.

It wasn't long after Mr. Bartz's club that, on the opposite end, near Chester and North Avenue, became another high spot with two brothers who pretty much spun off of what Mr. Bartz used to share with them — bringing noted entertainment, but also having a stage where young can develop. His son started right there in his own place, and he wanted to see others provide a stage for young artists like that, and so those two brothers did that. And what did they call that? It's a senior moment. It has a cute little name. And it's there now. It was a hot spot. And the beauty in all of it was not just to go in to hear who the artist was, but the crowd as they left their cars to go in there. The hi and hello and the musicians greeting one another, the personal atmosphere, that charm that it had. It was almost like you swooped up a part of New York, Harlem, and sat it into our city.

Q: What years are you talking about?

Glover: This has to have been around late '50s, into the '60s, because the riots came in the '60s so it had to be pretty much around that time period. But it was exciting, very exciting.

Q: And then Pennsylvania Avenue.

Glover: Was still quite, quite vibrant. And kids still had access to being able to see individuals, but not a lot of them could go, because of the liquor being in the spot. But Mr. Bartz was the kind of person who made availability happen for his young son who is today's master. You know, I'm trying to think who else came out of that. Well, the Gross boys from the School of the Arts. There's Mark Gross and Vincent Gross. Mark is a saxophonist with his own group and his own albums now. And Antonio and he were like, when you saw one, you saw the other. And I was told that Mark has a family, and Antonio's the godfather to his first-born.

And Vincent is the trumpet player. And Vincent comes in and out from Virginia now. But Vincent's trumpet and flugelhorn, and I'm told he's singing now. Never heard him actualize it. You know, always heard him singing behind you, but when you try to pivot him, he would always find excuses why he could not.

There's a young drummer today that I've met there, James Johnson, who's a part of Mark's family. I learned that Mark and Vincent are his uncles. So it's a hand-me-down stimulation. You know, you're good. You need to be doing this and this. And an encouragement to better themselves.

So, yes, I've really been very pleased with what has happened, and how the high schools feed into it. Stephanie Powell, when we speak of talent, Stephanie Powell's someone who went all through school and wanted to dance all her life. She is a great power and recognizing talent as she goes through and opens the door for development. She produces and gives great energy back to the community that she's come from. Her sister lives around the corner from me.

So I'm honored that I am able to, from every level, be accessible to encourage or to provide support to them. And these are my little sisters. As I've told them, I've had all my children. I don't need more children. I need little sisters, big sisters and brothers. Left Bank also provided an openness to family enjoyment, something that on Sundays is greatly missed from Charles Street. You could stand on one side of the street and watch families go in. I mean, it was just exciting.

I'd always come in after most of the crowd, because it was such a joy to stand on the opposite side of the street and to see mothers and fathers. I am all family life. That was also something that intrigues me and is just so warm. As you talk about it, you just get warm feelings.

But the music has no color. It has no color. It embraces people, all forms of life, all hues, all nationalities. The music has one spirit and that spirit is so driven and so electrifying when the music is playing. It drives people to either stand up and either shake hands with their neighbor or laugh about a particular person who's on stage. Music excites an individual, and just for the sake of it, they get so overwhelmed. It's like being in a different kind of church, where instead of shouting out loud, because they do some of that, they would embrace whomever was with them, or they would throw their hands up and close their eyes and they'd dance to it in some form or fashion.

Those memories are inside of me all the time. It's an energy that I don't have to call upon. The minute I hear a developing talent with an electric something inside of them that drives them to want to be better, it's like they press my button. You know, I want to get to know this baby, and I want to encourage, I want to open a door.

And so I got all of those feelings as I grew up watching and enjoying the persons that stimulated me. I had a mom who said yes, yes, yes. Her only encouragement was that I not try to in any way accumulate bad habits. And I've been blessed. If I accumulated them at all it's because I'm standing up in the midst of the smoke. [Laughter]

Q: Well, it's tough to be a musician without that support.

Glover: Yes. You have to appreciate the camaraderie and the respect you must give because you recognize that with some, where you might be reinforced with good family and friends, to some you were the friend and you were the confidante, and you were the person encouraging them to move to the next level.

I was very fortunate to have made some of those connections, and many of them. And they never die. That's the thing that is so wonderful is that people who say well, so and so died. To me they never die. I can put the music on, and they're refreshing in their spirit to me as if they just

walked through my door and we were chit chatting, because the music sets the pace for that memory, for that embracing, that warmth, that design to never be alone.

Q: What about music in the church when you were growing up?

Glover: For me it was Catholic Church.

Q: Which church?

Glover: St. Francis Xavier. Yes. And I found that I met people who could enjoy jazz because most of the persons who saw the talent in me never said that was not going to be, or that should not happen. I think the three who come to mind are Father Albert, and he was always there, and said you could always come and sing to us at suppertime because you can sing. I found a great camaraderie because within the congregation there were kids and young people that I still was going to school with who were that talent. When specialties were going to happen for our church, we were the talent that would perform. They looked over our shoulders, they not only embraced what we were doing, but they encouraged it.

Q: And they didn't mind you listening to jazz?

Glover: Not at all. No one spoke of it being horrific or the devil's music. You know. I heard more of that from black congregations than I heard from the congregations of the world.

In fact when the Pope visited us last, my son, my youngest son who is a detective now, but he was one of the special guards given to our Pope when he came, and I have the tile that he stood on. Aaron said he talked very openly with them about music, and jazz came up. Aaron said my mom is a jazz performer, and he looked at him and he said, what does she do? He said she sings. He said you will have to get us together. He said well, I will pray for that. And he was frail then, but he prayed with my son before he left. He's a great music lover and he's a darling old gentleman. And this year I think he won my heart more and more.

I find I don't go to church as often as I used to. I think a lot of what I enjoy is an ability to go to many varieties. I think I want to hear the world singing, the world playing. Because it's a harmony that does not really get shared or justifiably described by others. Consequently, some of what you're feeling as being overwhelming and ugly with the deaths, the many deaths, I think, a lot of it is because we don't listen much more.

There's not a calming factor like we enjoyed as we were coming up. We were everybody's child.

Q: I have heard so many people say that.

Glover: We were everybody's child, the policeman on the street, the postman, the store owners on the corner, an elder on the corner who knew you. You'd wonder, how could they remember all those children! They knew the person at the movies, the gentleman who managed the movies. Your parent would stop and say after such and such, they need to come home. You couldn't go over that time. So you were everybody's child.

Respect. We couldn't even roll our eyes! You had to sit or you stood, and you dared not to give any portrayal of being disrespectful to the other individual. That put more protection on the child growing up, becoming an adult. Because even today, you heard him, Yes, m'am. No, m'am, and: Excuse me? Manners. Manners. You know? And damn it, curse words, if you knew them, you didn't use them. And if you used them, you had a certain area that you used them in, and they better be a whisper and not let the other adults hear you. What's more, you couldn't use them at another friend or another person in a derogatory manner. And that is derogatory.

And even at Left Bank on Sundays, there was a camaraderie and a respect for everyone. And the children could come. Even though there might have been some beer, there was a respect for the child who was sitting at the table or who was there.

Q: Who were some of the voices and players that you heard at Left Bank?

Glover: At Left Bank, umm, they always brought you the best. Betty Carter, whom I loved and adored. These are the ones that impressed me the greatest. Miles [Davis], and of course, then Baltimore's own Albert Dailey. Albert was fascinating. My greatest amount of attention was through the musicians who respected me enough to want to encourage me to get better. Donald Bailey, who's dead and gone; Claude Hubbard, who just retired from the Prime Rib; two bassists, Phil Harris was one bassist, who was the bassist that I started sing with when I went into clubs; then there's the drummer, oh my, my. I called his name the other day. But when I call his name, you'll say yes because his name comes out so much.

Donald Bailey and Albert and the drummer that I'm trying to search for his name, they were always out on the road with singers, and they were fascinated that I should be so open. Jimmy Wells was another one. I'd be always asking them, well how do you do such and such, and why is it that they scat so. Ella was interesting and intriguing to me. But to me Ella gave me the big band in every aspect of her performance. And by me hearing her more because of the proximity of where she was when she'd come here to Baltimore, I got a chance to hear her when she's practicing or things like that.

I was turned on to big band early. When you're coming up as a teenager in high school, that's what we had. We swung because you could have the dance and all of that.

And so I listened to the musicians who would say, man, you got to learn to swing. But getting musicians to play for you as a singer was very much something for them as a hardship. First of all, they didn't want no girls. Yeah, we don't play for no singers. That's what you would get. So you had to either get better or go to them in a desire to learn. So I said if I open up and desire to learn, I'll get better.

A great influence of mine was Sarah Vaughn. I loved the melodic approach. I loved the intriguing long-winded endings that she seemed to have. I almost fell into a very bad scene by mimicking everything she did. Consequently, my real voice was not presenting itself until I was well involved with the music, almost like ten years. I sounded so much like her, ending for ending, briefing for briefing.

Columbia Records, when I was twenty-two, got interested in recording me, and the first recording, Mr. Fox took me to Columbia. We did the recording, and when we came out — you know how you listen to the music — I'm listening to the music and I said I don't remember Sarah singing that. And Mr. Fox was sitting on one end, and Ray Chambers, who had just been the pianist, he was sitting at the other. He said, that's not Sarah. That is you. And I said, wow, I'll never go anywhere sounding like her. She's already alive and well. I've got to find me.

It took me a good ten years to identify who I was under her.

Q: How do you think you got there?

Glover: Oh I got there because I began to listen attentively to what I was sounding like, what I was saying. I found that I would demonstrate certain privileges with the person who was on piano. Like saying, oh no, don't play it there. Let's change the ending, let's change some of the area where I'm going into certain keys. And I named it, and I said end it here. I found that I wouldn't end them the same way. And I loved minor keys.

I said I have to be soft, but I don't have to be exact. So I began to listen to me and to her. And I said, well, I've got to change. I've got to be me. If I'm ever gonna be of any great use to myself, I've got to be me. And then in came my listening to Betty [Carter]. I liked her drive. I liked that ability to relate to the music as a horn. So I began to listen to the two of them. I liked Billie's expression, but she was always so sad, and I didn't want to be sad.

Then I listened to Carmen McRae who was funny. Carmen really had a sense of humor, but she was direct and very brash at times. So I said, if the four women have to be in there, I like to scat, that was the day when I said I'd love to learn to scat. I'll never forget it. We were all four together at Albert Dailey's house, and Miles [Davis] had just come out with Milestones. I'm coming across the street. I could hear them rehearsing. It was Albert Dailey and Jimmy Wells. It was Donald Bailey, because Donald had just come off the road with Carmen McRae, and there was a drummer with them. It wasn't Reggie, the same drummer, it was Purnell Rice. Anyway, they were playing and I'm coming across Reservoir Street and Albert lived in a corner house and I could hear them playing — right there where Linden goes up and then Reservoir Street. There was another little street that came out and there was a school yard on this side and they all came out to Linden Avenue. And so by me coming up that street, I could hear, his house window was katty-corner. The window was up and I could hear them playing "Milestones." They were just playing it. I said to myself, that sounds like a good rehearsal and I rang the bell and his wife came down and let me in. I said, they sound like they're having a ball. She laughed and she said, yes they are and they just spoke your name. They said, Ruby ought to hear this! Like that.

So I came up the steps and I got at the top of the steps and it's Wells. Wells said, you know how we've been telling you what you should listen to in order to clearly define who you are? And I said, yeah, like that. You know how you question them over making a decision over you. And so Albert said, man, you need to listen to horns. I looked at him and I said, why? Like that. And he said, a singer cannot learn from a singer without duplication. Her bad marks or his bad marks — you're going to have them. You're going to demonstrate the flaws in your own presentation.

You're going to sound like that individual. He said, the best way, musically, and he went right into it, he and Wells. Bless them.

And Donald Bailey said, for instance, we've been listening to Miles. So he said, yes, we know you like Miles and the way he plays. It would behoove you to begin to listen to Miles, to listen to Coltrane, to listen to all the idols who play horn that you like. And he said even Chet Baker. He said you were the one who said Chet's not a singer. He sings almost too soft. So they said, you were the one who brought that out. We thought he was fine like he was. We found when we listened to him play you said that he played soft even when he was playing his trumpet because he was still gathering in his mind what should be expressed. So we want you to try to begin listening to horn players for the melodic sound you're after without the influence of singers. So I began listening, and Miles was the first one. The second one for me was — shucks — Cannonball [Adderley]. Only I said that Cannonball was a little too melodic, but Sonny Stitt came to town and I began listen to his fastness and I liked Gene Ammons and him together. And as the world would have it, as God would have it, he placed me in the Alpine Villa to sing with Gene Ammons and that was exciting because is he going to like me? That's when Donald said most horn players don't like singers.

I knew how they felt about me. I knew they were open because Freddie Thaxton used to say, I hate like hell to play for singers. So he said, you either have to sing good and take me somewhere else when I'm playing because I get drugged when I have to play for a singer. I said well, you're not the only one. But yet they would always be open enough — because Freddie was in school with us too. They'd be open enough that when they would travel with a singer — or with a horn player — they would come back and say, you need to try this! And they'd play it and I'd sing maybe the levels of it. I'd say, I don't like that sound and they'd say, well try again. They would try many aspects for my ear to catch.

So through my musician brothers, I began to listen to horns. I fell in love with the trumpet. I fell in love with the tenor saxophone and then, of course, learned later how to associate all of that with the bass. And Donald Bailey, I have to add, was someone who was a great influence on that. He played very melodically on the bass. He was the top bass player that any of the singers wanted — like Keeter [Betts] is to everybody now. That is how Donald Bailey was. He was always on the road with someone.

One day we were going to appear up on the [Pennsylvania] Avenue at a club called the Tijuana — it was a jazz house — and everybody, the pianist, the drummer and the horn player, were taken off the stage because their union fees were not up to par. That left me and Donald standing the on the stage for the show. I looked at him and I said, did I ask for this? And he said no, but it's a good challenge. I said, how in the world am I going to get to sing with just a bass? He said, there's a lady named Sheila Jordan that sings with just her bassist. I said, I've never heard of her. He said, you will from now on. He said you're going to be Sheila Jordan.

I had to go off on the side. I knew the keys, I told him the keys and I put my fingers in my ears so I could not hear the bass sound but could hear me for my starting key. And we had a ball! I learned to solo — we became a duet. So we began to do more and more of it. Then I began to do

it with the drums. So I learned meter and I learned accommodations that would be very, very much a growth factor for me. And not to have a sound that belonged to anybody but me.

The first time I really tried it, I was at the Red Fox. Ethel [Ennis] was away and I was replacing her at the Red Fox. In the midst of the song, I was scatting and singing, and I forgot about the microphone and I said, oh, my goodness, that is really me! The people out in front applauded and I was so joyous. I said, I got a sound! I don't remember who — I think it was Freddie — if it wasn't Freddie it was either Freddie or Claude [Hubbard] who said, man you are silly. I said, well, it's such a wonderful feeling to identify with yourself and it really was. It was so much fun! And from that point on, the four of them always offered something to me.

I've been very fortunate and I have two friends who always made my birthdays a special gathering for me. I have had the privilege of meeting everybody that has been my idol. When I met Carmen McRae, Donald [Bailey] was playing for her. She was at Oregon Ridge and I said, I'd love to meet her up front. Donald said well, she's not the charmingest person in the world. I said, yes she is. He said, no Ruby, you see her from the stage. He said, I work with her. She's a driver because she's a pianist and she knows what she wants and she drives you. There's something I find that most of the women in the business do that you don't do. I said, well what is that? He said, they curse like sailors and you don't curse. I said no, I guess that's something that's not my forte. I can say what I've got to say without those comical little words. He said, they're not so comical when they're firing at you like that. I met Carmen through the musicians but I met Sarah Vaughn up front in a master class over at Duke Ellington school by another musician who was playing with her and that was Albert Dailey. He was playing for her that day. So I got to meet her up front. Very charming, very warm and friendly, with her little bitty voice — her speaking voice never matched what her singing abilities were. I was mesmerized by that.

Then I met Billie [Holiday] just before she passed because of Albert [Dailey] — on the Avenue, right by the Comedy Club. She had been in the hospital and she had come out and she was doing a tour again. That was just not the most delightful of my life, but it really had a lot of warmth and remembrance to me, because to have someone that you love and adore, someone who the nature of bad writing just destroys with bad writing.

She was very frail and I went back into the dressing room and they introduced me. She said, you're a singer, and I said, I try at it. She said, I'm told by Albert that you're very good. I said thank you and thanks to my musician brother, I get better. She said, do you drink or smoke? I said no, I don't drink or smoke. And she said, you work in the clubs? And I said yes. She said, you're a family person, too? I said yes, like that. She said, well, never do as I do because, she says, I didn't have a family life. But be as great as you can be for yourself, and never forget that you have to live within the walls of who you are, even in the midst of a crowd. You still have to be you. I never forgot that. I took her hand and I shook her hand and she said, don't go home.

You know, they had a stage that came out from the wall and so when I went out to sit, Albert said, I sat you right here. Here was the stage and here I was, so I could see her. I could see the piano, and I could see the bassist and drummer. She sat on a stool that sort of swiveled, but you could see that she needed the kidney part of the piano to rest on. She was as beautiful as ever, but she was very ill and you could see that.

But as I teach my students, when we study masters of any sort, we study them for the legacy that they leave, not the ills that they perceive, or have, or are dealing with. That has nothing to do with the quality of the individual or their living, or how they perform, because they leave you that legacy. They leave you that warmth and all of that comfort, embracing you when you put their music on.

That's the first thing the students tell the other students — if you're going to take Ms. Glover's class, don't go in there talking about the person's had drugs because she isn't going to let you have that!

Q: It must have been interesting for you to meet her.

Glover: She came out of this area.

Q: Mr. McCoy mentioned that she used to drop in at the club.

Glover: Right up there at the Club Orleans, because she wanted the warmth of friendship. She wanted all of that. She always felt so alone, even, she said, in a crowded room she felt alone. I guess so. It was so negative, and she came up in a time in a time period where slavery and stuff were being dealt with. There was still a lot of ignorant behavior between Blacks and Whites and yet on stage it was totally different. Isn't it amazing what the music could do and the artists?

Then I get to meet Ella [Fitzgerald]. My youngest daughter loves her to pieces. Ella for me, and it was her last performance at the Morris Mechanic [Theater] — do you remember that? Keeter [Betts] and Joe Pass were with her and Tommy Flanagan. I said to [Clarence] "Du" Burns, oh, after the program I'd love to introduce my daughter, Toni, to Ella because she talks about Ella all the time. And "Du" was always identified to me from my mother as being my Godfather and the Mayor of Baltimore City long before he became the Mayor. I made reference always to him because that's how he was introduced: Here comes the Mayor! Everbody Black knew who he was because of his aspiring. He was just so many things to so many people and he's still like that in his darkest moments,

Q: A wonderful man.

Glover: Yes he is and his wife. I went to school with his sister-in-law. His sister-in-law came out of Catholic school, but we came out of public school and we could always get together on weekends.

But "Du" said to me, it's already arranged. And so we were sitting and she sang. She sang so beautifully. She made reference to special greetings going out to special people that she would very much like to meet with. I had no idea what arrangements "Du" had made, and so when the show was over, we started to go over to where his car was. He said no, you and Toni are going backstage and you're going to meet Keeter, because I'd said I'd like to meet Keeter up front. I'd met him, but I had not spent quality time with him. And so we go in the back and he said to Toni, " Toni; she said yes Uncle Du, he said, come here, I want you to do something with me. So he took her. She just had her 20th birthday. And he took her backstage.

Well, I'll tell you, I had seen my children mesmerized but she was mesmerized. They were hugging and Ella looked at her and said, well I always wanted a daughter and she said, you could have me. So she said, I'm just mesmerized. When my Mom puts you on, I want no talking — nothing!! I just want to be there and tonight I was like a little robot. I just sat still. My mom could have pressed all the buttons and I would have moved nowhere except right here to you. So she spent about an hour and a half with her and Toni's never forgotten that. She gave her pictures and signatures and they talked. She talked about Toni's shyness and she said, are you ever going to stop calling me Miss Ella? And she said, no. She said, how about Aunt Ella, I could fit that in very well. She said well do that.

For a while she would send Toni cards when she was around, but as she got busy she also got very sick too. It hit very hard when I had to tell Toni that she had passed, but my daughter had heard it over the air. She really questioned me. I was shocked. I knew she had diabetes, but I had no idea that she was staying in Paris because she had had the amputations done.

So I began to think about who else I had on my agenda. So for my 60th birthday, I got the opportunity to meet Nancy Wilson, like I'm talking to you. Thom and Dorothy made that available to me. It was fascinating;. Just before my 65th birthday, Thom took me to see Betty Carter up front. Betty and I had met previously, because Betty remembered. She whispered in my ear, you're the lady who doesn't drink or smoke, and I asked you did you get married and you said yes, and I said I didn't think that would happen either. [laughter] She was funny, but she was so talented. So I got to meet her up front and all to myself.

And for my 70th birthday, I got the pleasure of meeting and enjoying the Cat Lady [Eartha Kitt] — I thought she was adorable. She was a cute little lady. She was very warm and friendly. Eartha Kitt, I guess having seen her in movies as well, I couldn't' imagine that she was older by two or three years. Because she chatted with me and said you're only as old as you feel. She said, I'm always going to be 20.

And here's a picture of when they did the stamp. Now the three ladies on the far corner, the one that's holding the end with me, that's Billie's [Holiday] cousin. She's 75 now. I grew up with her, and those are her two daughters. That's the only two living members I remember, Geraldine as being a living cousin.

Just the memories alone. I grow as part of the history, because the history doesn't change. In my heart and in my soul the music is always there. When I'm lonely I put the music on of the folks who gave me the opportunity to find me. I find that I am closer to them then I ever thought I would be. I am grateful for that, because I am able to tap into a newer energy — the newer development of the young — the ones hoping to reach another part of their life. I find that my aging is not aging at all.

In the deepest part of my heart, I don't believe Dizzy [Gillespie] and Charlie Parker and all the ones that went on before, thought that the music would ever die. To them it was always going to live. And it only lives through the people who perceive it as a valuable talent and treasure and those who do something about giving it on. It is now ours to keep. And the talent is only given to us to develop. And once I've met the power that God or some greater power than me perceives

as being where I stop, only then will it stop. There are many, many, yet that we need to touch and there are many yet who would love the opportunity to touch those who they see within their realms who have a talent.

Q: You are right and it is good that there are people out there making that happen. There's been a resurgence in the past five years.

Glover: It's like deja vu. It's like you walk into a setting — exactly the setting or that you've done it before — and the person on that stage is you, or whomever. That happens and you have to chuckle to yourself, particularly when you get to be a young lady. You perceive it and the water comes up in your eyes because you don't just see yourself. You see the whole circle. The whole circle is there. You hear the music, and the artists that are there playing are not the artists that you see. You see those who have gone home before you. They are coming back to allow you the privilege to say yes, it's okay. We appreciate what's happening and you just keep on. You keep right on. It is not a competitive thing — that I must get across. Elizabeth, it is our privilege, yours and mine, and those who have come before us. It's never meant to be competitive. It is a concert that has been going on since day one until all of us meet in that wonderful area and have a bigger show than we ever had. But we must never let even the youngest of the performers see everything competitively. The minute that word or that feeling gets in there, they loose all the warmth that we enjoyed. They don't get that old baggy sweater that may have a hole in it, but it still keeps us warm when we need it.

Q: You saw Pennsylvania Avenue and you were part of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Glover: That was my heart. I was like Alice in Wonderland — if they ever had a black Alice, I was. [laughter] And for me, just to get off the 21 bus — see, because street cars left in about the '40s and '50s and we got those busses. When those buses hit, I was old enough to go by myself. Before, it was just a trip with your mom, but I was excited anyway. It was fascinating to see people coming and going and looking like — the dress was awesome. And then the place that you were going — my mother would always be going to the Royal Theatre and you would see more beautiful entertainment. People standing in line, holding their children's hands. We went early. Then they always had a midnight show — Friday they'd have a midnight show. People would be standing at 10:30 for the theatre to let about and they'd be going in to something that would be —there was a big show for New Year's Eve, and they would have big show for Duke Ellington — the bigger bands with a lot of real good finesse and swing — they were the ones who'd have the bigger programs. I'm telling you, I'd get excited and want to just like click my heels so I could go. So when I got up there I'd be smiling for days.

And it was just as exciting inside as out. And the music and how the people received it. It was always such a wonderful feeling — like nothing else I can remember. Because my mother was an entertainer, she knew how to go through the back and come through he back. When I got old enough, on a Saturday they'd be practicing music, I could sit on the stool and see who was going over the music. Of course, this darling here, he would never let them say, no she can't come in. I had my mother's pride. She would leave me there. I would sit on the stool and I'd be mesmerized. I was always there. When I first saw Sarah [Vaughn] there, she wasn't singing. I first got a chance to see her with [Earl] Fatha Hines, and she was playing the piano. That was one

year and then, like a year later, here she's back with Billy Eckstine and she's singing. So that was a great jump for me. She had almost no hair. She had a very close bob. She was a very pretty woman, very beautiful.

Of course you didn't always look at the woman, you looked at how fascinating Billy Eckstine was. Every time he came to town, something changed in the style of the men's wear — their shirt collars started to change, the kinds of suits. The men would beat it to the Royal Theater just to see what he was wearing. It was fascinating. The Avenue itself was electrifying because as I grew, it grew. It allotted me the pleasure of what just maybe a few steps to get to the Royal. As I got older, those steps added more of a lineage to me. To go straight on up until I hit the very top and it was always something for you to see, something exiting happening musically, wherever you went on both sides of the street it was music. If you went into the barber shop that used to sit right there at Dolphin and Pennsylvania Avenue, the barbershop sat next to the Pharmacy.

When you went in there they were always talking about who was up the street ,or who was playing, or don't forget there's a dance at the corner. There was always a conversation in every little pocket, where you saw people talking. They were telling each other, remember to come out because so and so is going to be there. Don't forget to go up the street because the Casino's got so and so. And so I watched myself and as I grew, I was not only able to see people who would come to the Royal, I was beginning to see those clubs develop to a point where they could have some of the acts that were at the Royal — in these private little club spots. Then, if you were old enough and accepted, you could go to the Sphinx Club and see everybody, because that's where they'd all be after the hours. By being a private club, you could get someone to take you and by the musicians always going up there, that's how I always got in and out of the Sphinx Club, before I became a real performer and when I did become a performer.

I didn't start on the Avenue. I started at Phils, on Mount and Mosher Street, in that cozy quaint place that he had in the back with Phil Harris on bass and Prince on drums and Claude Hubbard on piano. I went there one evening and I sang a song and the audience liked me and so did the owner, Rubin — the Rubin Brothers. Joe Rubin was the one who had that one. Joe came back and said to Claude, who's the singer? He said, her name is Ruby Glover. He said does she sing anywhere? No. He said, the audience sure liked her. They came in and out. It was a lovers' hideaway. He said, I can't hire her because my amusement tax will go up — she has to have an instrument. And so Prince, who was playing congos, said, I've got just the thing. I'll teach her to play a cocktail drum

They decided if I was going to come to work at a club, I'd have to play that drum.

END OF INTERVIEW